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MEMORANDUM



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FROM: Ernest G. Johnson
Director
Utilities Division

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AZ CORP COMMISSION
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DATE: December 26, 2003

RE: IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION OF RURAL NETWORK SERVICES, INC. FOR A CERTIFICATE OF CONVENIENCE AND NECESSITY TO PROVIDE FACILITIES-BASED LOCAL EXCHANGE SERVICES AND PETITION FOR COMPETITIVE CLASSIFICATION OF PROPOSED SERVICES WITHIN THE STATE OF ARIZONA (DOCKET NO. T-03453A-03-0670)

Attached is the Staff Report for the above referenced application. The Applicant is applying for approval to provide the following services:

- Facilities-based local exchange services

Staff is recommending approval of the application.

/ajl

Originator: Adam Lebrecht

Attachment: Original and Ten Copies

Arizona Corporation Commission
DOCKETED

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STAFF REPORT
UTILITIES DIVISION
ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSION

RURAL NETWORK SERVICES, INC.

DOCKET NO. T-03453A-03-0670

IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION OF RURAL NETWORK SERVICES, INC.
FOR A CERTIFICATE OF CONVENIENCE AND NECESSITY TO PROVIDE
FACILITIES-BASED LOCAL EXCHANGE SERVICES AND PETITION FOR
COMPETITIVE CLASSIFICATION OF PROPOSED SERVICES WITHIN THE
STATE OF ARIZONA

STAFF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Staff Report for Rural Network Services, Inc., Docket No. T-03453A-03-0670, was the responsibility of the Staff member listed below. Adam Lebrecht was responsible for the review and analysis of the application for a Certificate of Convenience and Necessity to provide facilities-based local exchange services; and petition for a determination that its proposed services should be classified as competitive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AL', is written over a horizontal line.

Adam Lebrecht
Executive Consultant I

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1. INTRODUCTION

On September 15, 2003, Rural Network Services, Inc. ("RNS" or "Applicant") filed an application for a Certificate of Convenience and Necessity ("CC&N") to provide facilities-based local exchange service within the State of Arizona. The Applicant petitioned the Arizona Corporation Commission ("Commission") for a determination that its proposed services should be classified as competitive.

Staff's review of this application addresses the overall fitness of the Applicant to receive a CC&N. Staff's analysis also considers whether the Applicant's services should be classified as competitive and if the Applicant's initial rates are just and reasonable.

2. THE APPLICATION FOR A CERTIFICATE OF CONVENIENCE & NECESSITY

This section of the Staff Report contains descriptions of the geographic market to be served by the Applicant, the requested services, and the Applicant's technical and financial capability to provide the requested services. In addition, this section contains the Staff evaluation of the Applicant's proposed rates and charges and Staff's recommendation thereon.

2.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE GEOGRAPHIC MARKET TO BE SERVED

RNS seeks authority to provide telecommunications services throughout the State of Arizona.

2.2 DESCRIPTION OF REQUESTED SERVICES

RNS proposes to provide facilities-based local exchange services.

2.3 THE ORGANIZATION

RNS is incorporated under the laws of the State of Idaho and has authority to transact business in Arizona.

2.4 TECHNICAL CAPABILITY TO PROVIDE THE REQUESTED SERVICES

RNS currently has a staff of eight (8) employees with a total combined experience of 21.5 years in the telecommunications industry. Based on this information, Staff has concluded that the Applicant has sufficient technical and managerial capabilities to provide facilities-based local exchange service.

2.5 FINANCIAL CAPABILITY TO PROVIDE THE REQUESTED SERVICES

The Applicant did provide unaudited financial statements for the twelve (12) months ending June 30, 2003. These financial statements list assets of \$779,751; negative equity of \$495,009; and a net loss of \$557,009. The Applicant did not provide notes related to the financial statements.

The Applicant stated in its Tariff (reference Section 2.4 on page 6) that it collects from its customers an advance, deposit, and/or prepayment. Staff believes that advances, deposits, and/or prepayments should be protected by the procurement of a performance bond. The bond coverage needs to increase in increments equal to 50 percent of the total minimum bond amount when the total amount of the advances, deposits, and prepayments is within 10 percent of the total minimum bond amount. Further, measures should be taken to ensure that the Applicant will not discontinue service to its local exchange customers without first complying with Arizona Administrative Code ("AAC") R14-2-1107.

To that end, Staff recommends that the Applicant procure a performance bond equal to \$100,000. The minimum bond amount of \$100,000 should be increased if at any time it would be insufficient to cover advances, deposits, and/or prepayments collected from the Applicant's customers. The bond amount should be increased in increments of \$50,000. This increase should occur when the total amount of the advances, deposits, and prepayments is within \$10,000 of the bond amount. If the Applicant desires to discontinue local exchange service, it must file an application with the Commission pursuant to AAC R14-2-1107. Additionally, the Applicant must notify each of its local exchange customers and the Commission 60 days prior to filing an application to discontinue service. Failure to meet this requirement should result in forfeiture of the Applicant's performance bond. Staff further recommends that proof of the above mentioned performance bond be docketed within 365 days of the effective date of an Order in this matter or 30 days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first. The performance bond must remain in effect until further order of the Commission.

2.6 ESTABLISHING RATES AND CHARGES

The Applicant would initially be providing service in areas where an incumbent local exchange carrier ("ILEC"), along with various competitive local exchange carriers ("CLECs") and interexchange carriers, are providing telephone service. Therefore, the Applicant would have to compete with those providers in order to obtain subscribers to its services. The Applicant would be a new entrant and would face competition from both an incumbent provider and other competitive providers in offering service to its potential customers. Therefore, the Applicant would generally not be able to exert market power. Thus, the competitive process should result in rates that are just and reasonable.

Both an initial rate (the actual rate to be charged) and a maximum rate must be

listed for each competitive service offered, provided that the rate for the service is not less than the Company's total service long-run incremental cost of providing the service pursuant to A.A.C. R14-2-1109.

The rates proposed by this filing are for competitive services. In general, rates for competitive services are not set according to rate of return regulation. Staff obtained information from the company and has determined that its fair value rate base is zero. Accordingly, the company's fair value rate base is too small to be useful in a fair value analysis. In addition, the rate to be ultimately charged by the company will be heavily influenced by the market. Therefore, while Staff considered the fair value rate base information submitted by the company, it did not accord that information substantial weight in its analysis.

3. LOCAL EXCHANGE CARRIER SPECIFIC ISSUES

Since the Applicant intends to provide local exchange service, the issues related to the provision of that service are discussed below.

3.1 DIRECTORY LISTINGS AND DIRECTORY ASSISTANCE

Callers should be able to determine the telephone numbers belonging to customers of alternative local exchange companies, such as the Applicant. Staff recommends that the Applicant file a plan, within 365 days of the effective date of the Order in this matter or 30 days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first, that must remain in effect until further order of the Commission and that describes how it plans to have its customers' telephone numbers included in the incumbent's Directories and Directory Assistance databases before it begins providing local exchange service.

3.2 NUMBER PORTABILITY

Another issue associated with the Applicant's proposal to become a competitive local exchange company relates to how telephone numbers should be administered. Local exchange competition may not be vigorous if customers, especially business customers, must change their telephone numbers to take advantage of a competitive local exchange carrier's service offerings. Staff recommends that the Applicant pursue permanent number portability arrangements with other local exchange carriers ("LECs") that are consistent with federal laws, federal rules and state rules.

3.3 PROVISION OF BASIC TELEPHONE SERVICE AND UNIVERSAL SERVICE

The Commission has adopted rules to address maintenance of universal telephone service during and after the transition to a competitive telecommunications services

market. The rules contain the terms and conditions for contributions to and support received from telephone service subscribers to finance the Arizona Universal Service Fund ("AUSF"). Under the rules, the Applicant will be required to participate in the financing of the AUSF, and it may be eligible for AUSF support. Therefore, Staff recommends that approval of the Applicant's application for a CC&N be conditioned upon the Applicant's agreement to abide by and participate in the AUSF mechanism established by Decision No. 59623, dated April 24, 1996 (Docket No. RT-00000E-95-0498).

3.4 QUALITY OF SERVICE

Staff believes that the Applicant should be ordered to abide by the quality of service standards that were approved by the Commission for Qwest (f/k/a USWC) in Docket No. T-01051B-93-0183 (Decision No. 59421). Because the penalties that were developed in that docket were initiated only because Qwest's level of service was not satisfactory, Staff does not recommend that those penalties apply to the Applicant. In the competitive market that the Applicant wishes to enter, the Applicant generally will have no market power and will be forced to provide a satisfactory level of service or risk losing its customers. Therefore, Staff believes that it is unnecessary to subject the Applicant to those penalties at this time.

3.5 ACCESS TO ALTERNATIVE LOCAL EXCHANGE SERVICE PROVIDERS

Staff expects that there will be new entrant providers of local exchange service who will install the plant necessary to provide telephone service to, for example, a residential subdivision or an industrial park much like existing local exchange companies do today. There may be areas where the Applicant installs the only local exchange service facilities. In the interest of providing competitive alternatives to the Applicant's local exchange service customers, Staff recommends that the Applicant be prohibited from barring access to alternative local exchange service providers who wish to serve such areas. In this way, an alternative local exchange service provider may serve a customer if the customer so desires. Access to other providers should be provided pursuant to the provisions of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the rules promulgated there under and Commission rules on interconnection and unbundling.

3.6 911 SERVICE

The Applicant has indicated in its application that it will provide all customers with 911 and E911 service, where available, or will coordinate with ILECs and emergency service providers to provide the service. Staff believes that the Applicant should be required to work cooperatively with local governments, public safety agencies, telephone companies, the National Emergency Number Association and all other concerned parties to establish a systematic process to develop a universal emergency telephone number system. Staff recommends that the Applicant be required to certify, through the 911 service provider in the area in which it intends to provide service, that all

issues associated with the provision of 911 service have been resolved with the emergency service providers before it begins to provide local exchange service. This certification should be filed with the Commission within 365 days of the effective date of the order in this matter or 30 days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first, and must remain in effect until further order of the Commission.

3.7 CUSTOM LOCAL AREA SIGNALING SERVICES

In its decisions related to Qwest's proposal to offer Caller ID and other CLASS features in the State, the Commission addressed a number of issues regarding the appropriateness of offering these services and under what circumstances it would approve the proposals to offer them. The Commission concluded that Caller ID could be offered as long as per call and line blocking, with the capability to toggle between blocking and unblocking the transmission of the telephone number, is provided as options to which customers could subscribe with no charge. The Commission also approved a Last Call Return service that will not return calls to telephone numbers that have the privacy indicator activated, which indicates that the number has been blocked. The Commission further required that Qwest engage in education programs when introducing or providing the service(s).

Staff recommends that the Applicant be required to abide by all the Commission decisions and policies regarding Caller ID and other CLASS services. However, Staff does not believe that it is necessary for the Applicant to engage in the educational program that was ordered for Qwest as long as customers in the areas where the Applicant intends to serve have already been provided with educational material and are aware that they can have their numbers blocked on each call or at all times with line blocking.

3.8 EQUAL ACCESS FOR INTEREXCHANGE CARRIERS

Although the Applicant did not indicate that its switch will be "fully equal access capable" (i.e. would provide equal access to interexchange companies), the Commission requires local exchange companies to provide 2-Primary Interexchange Carriers ("2-PIC") equal access. 2-PIC equal access allows customers to choose different carriers for interLATA and intraLATA toll service and would allow customers to originate intraLATA calls using the preferred carrier on a 1+ basis. Staff recommends that the Applicant be required to provide 2-PIC equal access.

4. REVIEW OF COMPLAINT INFORMATION

The Applicant has not had an application for service denied, or revoked in any state. There have not been any formal complaint proceedings involving the Applicant. There have not been any civil or criminal proceedings against the Applicant. Consumer Services reports no complaint history within Arizona.

The Applicant indicated that none of its officers, directors or partners have been involved in any civil or criminal investigations, formal or informal complaints. The applicant also indicated that none of its officers, directors or partners have been convicted of any criminal acts in the past ten (10) years.

5. COMPETITIVE SERVICES ANALYSIS

The Applicant has petitioned the Commission for a determination that the services it is seeking to provide should be classified as competitive.

5.1 COMPETITIVE SERVICES ANALYSIS FOR LOCAL EXCHANGE SERVICES

5.1.1 **A description of the general economic conditions that make the relevant market for the service one that is competitive.**

The analysis of the market for local exchange service that the Applicant seeks to enter must take into account the fact that there are two local exchange service submarkets. The first is the local exchange service market that consists of locations where ILECs currently provide service. The second local exchange service market consists of locations within ILECs' service territories where ILECs are authorized to provide local exchange service, but where they do not actually provide service.

The local exchange market that the Applicant seeks to enter is one in which a number of new CLECs have been authorized to provide local exchange service. Nevertheless, ILECs hold a virtual monopoly in the local exchange service market. At locations where ILECs provide local exchange service, the Applicant will be entering the market as an alternative provider of local exchange service and, as such, the Applicant will have to compete with those companies in order to obtain customers. In areas where ILECs do not serve customers, the Applicant may have to convince developers to allow it to provide service to their developments. Staff recommends that the Applicant be prohibited from barring access to alternative local exchange service providers who wish to serve such areas. In this way, an alternative local exchange service provider may serve a customer if the customer so desires.

5.1.2 **The number of alternative providers of the service.**

Qwest and various independent LECs are the primary providers of local exchange service in the State. Several CLECs and local exchange resellers are also providing local exchange service.

5.1.3 **The estimated market share held by each alternative provider of the service.**

Since Qwest and the independent LECs are the primary providers of local exchange service in the State, they have a large share of the market. Since the CLECs and local exchange resellers have only recently been authorized to offer service, they have limited market share.

5.1.4 The names and addresses of any alternative providers of the service that are also affiliates of the telecommunications Applicant, as defined in A.A.C. R14-2-801.

Midvale Telephone Exchange
P.O. Box 7
Midvale, Idaho 83645

5.1.5 The ability of alternative providers to make functionally equivalent or substitute services readily available at competitive rates, terms and conditions.

ILECs have the ability to offer the same services that the Applicant has requested in their respective service territories. Similarly, many of the CLECs and local exchange resellers also offer substantially similar services.

5.1.6 Other indicators of market power, which may include growth and shifts in market share, ease of entry and exit, and any affiliation between and among alternative providers of the service(s).

The local exchange service market is:

- a. One in which ILECs own networks that reach nearly every residence and business in their service territories and which provide them with a virtual monopoly over local exchange service. New entrants are also beginning to enter this market.
- b. One in which new entrants will be dependent upon ILECs:
 1. To terminate traffic to customers.
 2. To provide essential local exchange service elements until the entrant's own network has been built.
 3. For interconnection.
- c. One in which ILECs have had an existing relationship with their customers that the new entrants will have to overcome if they want to compete in the market and one in which new entrants do not have a long history with any customers.
- d. One in which Qwest provides a quality of service that has generated a significant number of complaints. These complaints led the Commission

to adopt service quality rules that contain penalties if the service quality standards are not met. A provider of alternative service, such as the Applicant, should provide Qwest--as well as other incumbents--with the incentive to provide higher quality service, including service installation and repair on a timely basis.

- e. One in which most customers have few, if any, choices since there is generally only one provider of local exchange service in each service territory.
- f. One in which the Applicant will not have the capability to adversely affect prices or restrict output to the detriment of telephone service subscribers.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following sections contain the Staff recommendations on the application for a CC&N and the Applicant's petition for a Commission determination that its proposed services should be classified as competitive.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE APPLICATION FOR A CC&N

RNS is incorporated under the laws of the State of Idaho. RNS currently has a staff of eight (8) employees with a total combined experience of 21.5 years in the telecommunications industry. Based on this, Staff believes RNS has the capability to provide its proposed services, as requested. Therefore, Staff recommends that the application for a CC&N to provide intrastate telecommunications services, as listed in Section 2.2 of this Report, be granted. In addition, Staff recommends the following:

1. That, unless it provides services solely through the use of its own facilities, the Applicant procure an Interconnection Agreement, within 365 days of the effective date of the order in this matter or 30 days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first, that must remain in effect until further order of the Commission, before being allowed to offer local exchange service;
2. That the Applicant file with the Commission, within 365 days of the effective date of the order in this matter or 30 days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first, its plan to have its customers' telephone numbers included in the incumbent's Directories and Directory Assistance databases. This plan must remain in effect until further order of the Commission;
3. That the Applicant pursue permanent number portability arrangements with other LECs pursuant to Commission rules, federal laws and federal rules;

4. That the Applicant agree to abide by and participate in the AUSF mechanism instituted in Decision No. 59623, dated April 24, 1996 (Docket No. RT-00000E-95-0498);
5. That the Applicant abides by the quality of service standards that were approved by the Commission for Qwest in Docket No. T-01051B-93-0183;
6. That the Applicant be prohibited from barring access to alternative local exchange service providers who wish to serve in areas where the Applicant is the only provider of local exchange service;
7. That the Applicant be required to certify, through the 911 service provider in the area in which it intends to provide service, that all issues associated with the provision of 911 service have been resolved with the emergency service providers. This certification should be filed with the Commission within 365 days of the effective date of the order in this matter or 30 days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first, and must remain in effect until further order of the Commission;
8. That the Applicant be required to abide by all the Commission decisions and policies regarding CLASS services;
9. That the Applicant be required to provide 2-PIC equal access;
10. That the Applicant be required to notify the Commission immediately upon changes to the Applicant's address or telephone number;
11. That the Applicant comply with all Commission rules, orders, and other requirements relevant to the provision of intrastate telecommunications service;
12. That the Applicant maintain its accounts and records as required by the Commission;
13. That the Applicant file with the Commission all financial and other reports that the Commission may require, and in a form and at such times as the Commission may designate;
14. That the Applicant maintain on file with the Commission all current tariffs and rates, and any service standards that the Commission may require;
15. That the Applicant cooperate with Commission investigations including, but limited to customer complaints;
16. That the Applicant participates in and contributes to a universal service fund, as required by the Commission; and

17. That the Applicant be subject to the Commission's rules governing interconnection and unbundling and the 1996 Telecommunications Act and the rules promulgated thereunder. In the event that the Applicant provides essential services or facilities that potential competitors need in order to provide their services, the Applicant should be required to offer those facilities or services to these providers on non-discriminatory terms and conditions pursuant to federal laws, federal rules, and state rules;
18. The rates proposed by this filing are for competitive services. In general, rates for competitive services are not set according to rate of return regulation. Staff obtained information from the company and has determined that its fair value rate base is zero. Accordingly, the company's fair value rate base is too small to be useful in a fair value analysis. In addition, the rate to be ultimately charged by the company will be heavily influenced by the market. Therefore, while Staff considered the fair value rate base information submitted by the company, the fair value information provided should not be given substantial weight in this analysis; and
19. The Applicant should be ordered to file an application with the Commission pursuant to AAC R14-2-1107, if the Applicant desires to discontinue service. The Applicant should be required to notify each of its local exchange customers and the Commission 60 days prior to filing an application to discontinue service. Any failure to do so should result in forfeiture of the Applicant's performance bond.

Staff further recommends that the Applicant be ordered to comply with the following. If it does not do so, the Applicant's CC&N shall be null and void without further order of the Commission and no time extensions shall be granted.

1. The Applicant shall file a conforming tariff for its CC&N within 365 days from the date of an Order in this matter or 30 days prior to providing service, whichever comes first, and in accordance with the Decision; and
2. The Applicant shall:
 - a. procure a performance bond equal to \$100,000. The minimum bond amount of \$100,000 should be increased if at any time it would be insufficient to cover advances, deposits, and/or prepayments collected from the Applicant's customers. The bond amount should be increased in increments of \$50,000. This increase should occur when the total amount of the advances, deposits, and prepayments is within \$10,000 of the bond amount; and
 - b. docket proof of the performance bond within 365 days of the effective date of an Order in this matter or 30 days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first, and must remain in effect until further order of the Commission.

6.2 RECOMMENDATION ON THE APPLICANT'S PETITION TO HAVE ITS
PROPOSED SERVICES CLASSIFIED AS COMPETITIVE

Staff believes that the Applicant's proposed services should be classified as competitive. There are alternatives to the Applicant's services. The Applicant will have to convince customers to purchase its services, and the Applicant has no ability to adversely affect the local exchange service markets. Therefore, the Applicant currently has no market power in the local exchange service markets where alternative providers of telecommunications services exist. Staff therefore recommends that the Applicant's proposed services be classified as competitive.

SERVICE LIST FOR: RURAL NETWORK SERVICES, INC.
DOCKET NO. T-03453A-03-0670

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